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ABSTRACT

A group of Boulder, Colorado, high school students and townspeople conducted a two-day community environmental fair in the downtown street of Boulder. The fair, providing various instructive experiments depicting alternatives for Boulder's future social and physical environment, grew out of the Student Assisted Development of Materials for Environmental and Social Studies (SADMESS) Project conducted by the Social Science Education Consortium (SSEC). Half of the students involved in the project decided to get the community involved in an educational fair. In their effort to get permission to hold the fair and to elicit the active participation of the community, the students made presentations to political and governmental officials, businessmen's groups, local environmental groups, and school and university groups. After much discussion and debate, permission to hold the fair was granted. Some of the many fair activities included a glass recycling exhibit, pottery demonstrations, fabrication of a 39-foot geodesic dome, and electricar exhibit, and many lively discussion groups. Evaluation results indicated that people found the fair interesting, enjoyable, and educational. The students recorded the entire process of planning and execution of the fair in the Boulder Experiments Scrapbook, see ED 081 707. It contains many helpful suggestions about how to do a better job of putting on a community fair. (Author/RM)

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PROFILES OF PROMISE are descriptive brochures that highlight innovative social studies and social education practices which teachers and administrators can easily adapt to their own classrooms or schools.

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BOULDER EXPERIMENTS: An Environmental Fair

At sundown on May 12, 1972, a group of high school students and townspeople converged on the main intersection in downtown Boulder, Colorado. They proceeded to make preparations for blocking off two and a half blocks of Pearl and Thirteenth Streets for the next two days. Some passers-by thought they were demonstrating against the Vietnam War, since Boulder had witnessed several days of tense demonstrations during the preceding week, following President Nixon's announcement of the mining of Haiphong Harbor.

But, no, this was not an anti-war demonstration. The students and townspeople were putting up "no parking" signs and moving in equipment in preparation for Boulder Experiments, a community environmental fair that was to take place during the weekend.

THE SADMESS PROJECT

The Boulder Experiments Fair grew out of an environmental education project conducted by the Social Science Education Constorium, Inc. (SSEC) and funded by the Office of Environmental Education of the U.S. Office of Education. The name of the project was SADMESS--Student Assisted Development of Materials for Environmental and Social Studies.

SADMESS took place over a period of about 16 months, beginning in August 1971 and running through December 1972. The purpose of the project was to involve high school students in the entire process of curriculum development, from the development of the idea through the production and evaluation of the finished product. Eight high school students from the Boulder Valley Public Schools worked 20 hours per week with Consortium professional staff members during the 1971-72 school year and following summer. They received course credit for a portion of their time and were paid on an hourly basis for the remainder.

Two major projects were undertaken by the students and professional staff during the year. Half of the students, the "intellectuals," were interested primarily in problems of social values and the environment. They decided to develop a book exploring the positions of major religions and philosophies regarding man's relationship to the environment. The outcome of their efforts was a beautifully illustrated book entitled *Sunstone Unfolding* (Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., 1973). The other half, the "activists," were more interested in *doing* something, here and now. They decided to get the Boulder community involved in a massive educational fair, Boulder Experiments.

GETTING THE IDEA

The activists seemed to have more diffuse interests, although they knew they preferred to be involved in some sort of activity with lots of people in the community. After more brainstorming sessions than they cared to count, and much anguish over the fact that the "intellectuals" were already well started on their project, the students finally hit upon an idea that would accommodate their divergent interests and meet their action-first criterion. They decided to throw a massive environmental fair in which the whole community could participate.

The idea came quite by accident. A visitor from another environmental education project in the area was reminiscing about a street fair he had attended in Washington, D.C., in which a main shopping street had been turned into a mall for one day, with music and arts-and-crafts stalls and the like. One student commented that he had always thought it would be nice to be able to wander along the downtown Boulder streets without worrying about cars, just to look at the quaint old buildings and window shop. Everyone in the group began to chime in their ideas about ways to make downtown Boulder more pleasant. And then, someone said, "Why don't we put on a fair on Pearl Street? We could show Boulderites how nice downtown can be if you don't have to contend with the noise and smell and danger of cars!"

GETTING ORGANIZED

The seed of the idea was followed by several days of discussion and brainstorming, and it was finally decided that the aim of the fair would be to provide numerous and various instructive "experiments" depicting alternatives for Boulder's future social and physical environment. The activities during the fair would be

designed to allow fair-goers to participate as much as possible, rather than simply passively viewing the goings-on. The job of the SADMESS coordinators would be to make arrangements with the city fathers for closing the downtown streets; to provide logistic support for the fair; and, most of all, to get children, businessmen, university people, housewives, civic clubs--everybody in town--to put together activities for the fair.

Getting the overall plan down on paper turned out to be something quite different from organizing the specific details and carrying them out. The project didn't really get into full gear until over two full months after the idea struck. A few community resource people were contacted, and a lot of day dreams dreamed, during November, December, and most of January. And, of course, Thanksgiving and Christmas vacation schedules cut into the smooth progress of the project, too.

In addition, neither the students nor the professional staff had any experience to speak of in putting together a community-wide event of these proportions. The professional staff could and did offer their advice based on experiences in organizing other types of group activities. However, the students seemed to be especially intent on following a truly "discovery learning" mode and didn't seem to quite trust this advice--in fact, at times they felt that the "grown-ups" might be trying to take their decision-making powers away from them by "advising" them.

Along about mid-January, a blow-up occurred over the issue of "getting organized." As a result of the blow-up, a new, more detailed schedule was sketched out, with specific assignments and deadlines given to each member of the team. That lasted about a week, which was better than the previous half-life of such plans. The group slid back into its old ways, using the "let it flow" approach to fair planning and preparation. Although it made several members of the group quite nervous to operate in this fashion, it became apparent that the personal styles of some group members would prevent development of any highly organized approach to the fair.

GETTING THE PEOPLE

One of the major, major tasks of the Boulder Experiments planners was to "sell" their idea to the community and entice people from all parts of the community to participate in the fair. In scanning the calendar of events from November through May, one is struck by the number of meetings the students attended and the variety of groups with whom they met: presentations were made to all the local environmental groups, civic associations, political and governmental officials, university groups, elementary school children and teachers, school officials, businessmen's groups, garden clubs, dance troupes--just about everybody anyone could think of. The purpose of these meetings was, at minimum, to enlist the passive support of individuals and groups for the fair, or better yet, to elicit their active participation in putting together activities, supplying equipment, and helping with getting the necessary permissions to conduct the fair.

GETTING PERMISSION

You wouldn't believe the permits and permissions that are necessary to put on an event such as the Boulder Experiments Fair! Permission to use private parking lots. Permission to close down streets. Fire Department approval of electrical wiring, fire lanes, spacing of booths. Health permits for food concessions. Concert permits. Variances for amplified music in the bandshell. Sidewalk vendor permits. Permission to use City and County facilities. Permission to distribute advertising fliers in the public schools.

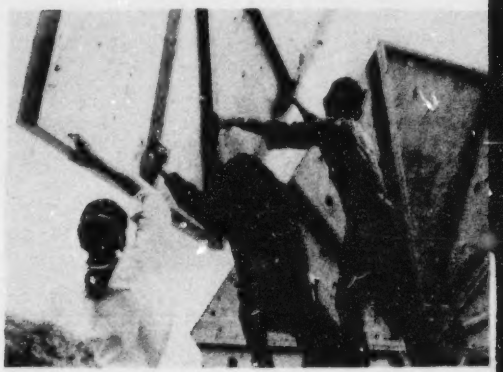
The major permission-getting effort was directed toward the closing of downtown streets for the two days of the fair. Because of the late start and failure to lay groundwork carefully, the BE planners almost did not obtain the street-closing permit. This, of course, would have destroyed a major objective of the fair--to display the downtown area in a new atmosphere for a short period of time.

The difficulty began because the group did not realize that the City would not give the street-closing permit unless the Downtown Businessmen's Association (DBA) approved it. Learning about the power of the DBA in this regard was a major political lesson of Boulder Experiments. The DBA members were concerned because 1) they hadn't been formally contacted earlier so they could help with the planning, and 2) the planning was apparently so slipshod. They were quite worried that the fair would damage their business on Mother's Day weekend, one of the biggest business periods of the year. There was apparently some fear that the fair would attract local "hippies" and scare away the "straights"--the downtown businessmen's customers. Early cooperation in planning with the businessmen, plus a well-organized presentation of plans probably would have counteracted these fears, and the somewhat tense confrontation that ensued might have been avoided.

The discussion and debate with the businessmen was tremendously exciting for the BE planners. It got quite heated at points. But, finally, the DBA voted to approve the fair and send a letter indicating its approval to the City Manager.

An audible sigh of relief went up from the Boulder Experimenters. Less than a month before the scheduled dates of the fair, and all their efforts since November had almost gone down the drain!

Potter demonstrates the use of the ...fer's wheel.

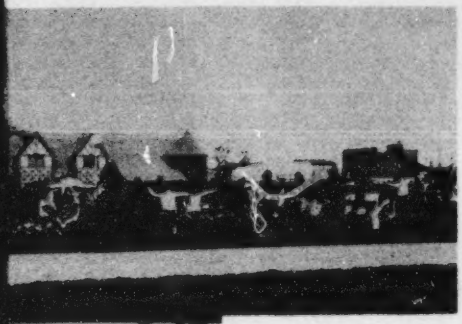


Putting a section of the 39-foot geodesic dome in place.

A youngster tries out the Electricar built by a group of students at the University of Colorado.

Grinding glass at the glass recycling exhibit put up by a group from Colorado School of Mines.

Bikers supporting passage of a bond issue to build bikeways throughout the city move through Pearl Street.



Folk dancers on the library lawn.

Participants in a discussion group listen attentively while the fair-goers mill about them.

GETTING THE WORK DONE

After this time-consuming excursion into the political realm, the planners could return to the myriad problems of making final preparations for the fair. As the fair drew frighteningly close, they realized they could no longer afford the luxury of "conceptualizing" and "generating big ideas" on a grand scheme. The nitty gritty work HAD to be done. Signs had to be made, programs printed, San-O-Lets rented, nightwatchmen hired, a student security and clean-up battalion organized, tables and chairs rented, an electrician hired to supervise the installation of the wiring that had yet to be bought, a schedule of volunteers for fair set-up and take-down worked out, bus drivers scheduled, a trailer for fair headquarters rented, notices to fair participants about their locations sent out, and on and on. Thanks to the sharp questioning of the downtown businessmen, the staff had begun to realize how much detailed work still remained to be done and how little time there was.

GETTING SURPRISED

About a week before the fair, things were moving apace. It appeared that, with only slightly more than a superhuman effort, the fair would come off quite nicely. There were still numerous last-minute details to wrap up, but everyone was operating at a high enough energy level to make it possible.

Then, on May 9, the fair almost crumbled instantaneously. President Nixon announced the mining of Haiphong Harbor on the evening of May 8, 1972. Demonstrations broke out immediately throughout Boulder, and a group of anti-war protesters blockaded a highway coming into the city. Tear gas wafted through the SADMESS office periodically for the next few days. And the Boulder Experimenters spent endless hours discussing whether the fair should be called off. Some felt they had to shift their attention to the anti-war effort; some felt that the environmental issue was as important as the war issue and shouldn't be forgotten in the heat of the moment; some felt that a mass gathering of people for the fair might explode into anti-war demonstrations; some worried that the diversion of staff and volunteer manpower to the anti-war effort would preclude finishing up fair preparations adequately; and so it went. City officials, downtown businessmen, and volunteers were contacted for their views on whether the fair should proceed. It was decided plans should continue, on the assumption that the community would be calmed down by the weekend; also that both peace groups and pro-war groups should be contacted, and that discussions between them in a rational atmosphere should be integrated into the framework of the fair.

GETTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Boulder Experiments did occur, as you probably must have guessed, else this *Profile of Promise* would not have been written.

Bright and early Saturday morning the street barriers went up and the staff and volunteers began unloading chairs and tables from a flatbed truck. The sun was shining and the sky looked more promising than the night before. People began to appear to set up their booths and passers-by stopped to see what was going on. By noon, fairly good crowds of people, all kinds of people--little tykes, old folks, young couples, hippies, straights--were milling about, observing recycling exhibits, trying their hands at throwing a pot, dancing to the music, discussing community problems at Fred's Sidewalk Cafe, wandering over to the library parking lot to see the 39 foot wooden dome, and just wandering down the middle of the once car-crowded Pearl Street.

To the BE staffers the fair seemed almost anticlimactic. It went so smoothly and pleasantly that they wondered how it could have seemed like such a hassle during the few weeks of frantic last-minute preparations that preceded it. Not even the clean-up Sunday night was a bother: Pearl Street was returned to its original state within two hours after the fair closed.

GETTING FEEDBACK

One of the most important elements in the fair plans was evaluation. The Boulder Experimenters wanted to find out how Boulderites reacted to the fair in general and to specific activities. During the fair, strolling interviewers stopped fair-goers and asked them questions from a previously drawn up interview schedule. In addition, the BE staffers drew up a post-fair interview schedule that was administered to a sample of the businessmen and volunteers. Also, students from an economics class at the University of Colorado conducted a survey of business volume during the fair as compared to the previous year's Mother's Day weekend. Finally, the students did an extensive debriefing among themselves, through lengthy written evaluations and long discussions reviewing not only the fair itself but also the process of planning.

The results of all these evaluation efforts were surprisingly positive. People who attended the fair found it interesting, enjoyable, educational, and "happy." Probably the least satisfied group was the BE staff itself, who were, of course, intimately acquainted with the ways in which the fair did not live up to its promoters' expectations. The survey of downtown businessmen showed mixed results; some were flatly uncooperative about the economic survey and quite vocal in their complaints about the fair; others were very pleased.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

The Boulder Experimenters came up with a host of suggestions about how to do a better job in putting on a community fair. These are all recorded, along with extensive descriptions and illustrations of the entire process of planning and execution of Boulder Experiments, in the *Boulder Experiments Scrapbook* (Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., 1973), which the students put together during the summer following the fair. Among the more important hints are the following:

LIMIT YOUR GOALS--a constant problem is keeping your ideas from running away with you. With limited time and manpower, you can't do everything. Though you want to be open to good new ideas, you have to guard against spending too much time on generating nifty ideas and too little time on accomplishing them.

FIND OUT ABOUT LEGAL REQUIREMENTS EARLY--try to find someone in local government that will help you draw up a list of permits that will be needed and whom to contact about each. Find the relevant decision-makers and what they will require of you. Enlist the decision-makers' cooperation in planning as early as possible.

FOLLOW UP ON VOLUNTEERS AND COMMITMENTS--don't get people excited about your idea, then leave them hanging. Make sure that the commitments you make and that others make are clear and understood by all parties involved.

WRITE THINGS DOWN--you can't possibly remember everything you do over a period of several months; and others may need the information when you can't be located.

USE YOUR CHARM AND INGENUITY ABOUT MONEY--though BE was fairly well financed, being a part of a federal grant, it's not necessary to be rich to throw a fair. Businessmen in the community are happy to make contributions in money, in kind, and in services: and volunteers will contribute special skills and just plain hard work.

BE AS CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR GROUP'S INTERACTION "STYLE" AS YOU ARE ABOUT YOUR OUTPUT (THE FAIR)--finding the ideal position between rigid organization and utter chaos, between over-communication (too many bull sessions with too little work) and no communication, is one of the most important and difficult tasks. Each group is unique, so you have to find your way pretty much on your own, though there are some group dynamics techniques you can employ. The main thing is to be as conscious of the need to nurture good group interaction as you are of the need to pull the fair off.

DON'T PANIC WHEN EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE GOING WRONG--there's probably at least one major disaster in every big effort such as this. For those possible disasters you can foresee (such as rain), draw up contingency plans. For those you can't (such as the mining of Haiphong Harbor and rioting in the streets), just use your head--plus any other heads that happen to be handy.

ERIC DOCUMENTS

Editor's Note: There are many ERIC documents dealing with the topic of environmental studies. The interested reader will want to conduct an ERIC search to locate those documents useful to him. The documents listed below are specifically related to community action programs.

ED 071 877 - ENVIRONMENTAL THRUST HANDBOOK. 46 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. This handbook describes 22 projects as potential environmental thrusts at the community level. Each project briefly covers the situation and problem, objectives, a possible work plan, criteria for evaluating effectiveness, and available resources, noting both government and non-government assistance available.

ED 067 233 - GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY. 37 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. A comprehensive, community environmental inventory is viewed in this booklet as an ongoing process of investigation and study to compile and evaluate information about the natural and man-made environmental features and characteristics of an area. It is of value to the community in planning development and resolving environmental problems and to the school in its environmental education program, with emphasis on the individual community.

For further information,

WRITE:

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READ:

SUNSHINE UNFOLDING. By Craig R. Holdrege, Susanne Bank, Sheryl Wiggins, and Dan Bouricius. SSEC Publication #151. 87 pp., paperback (1973). $4.95.

BOULDER EXPERIMENTS SCRAPBOOK. SSEC Publication #152. 190 pp., mimeo (1973). $4.95.

SADMESS FINAL REPORT. SSEC Publication #153. 288 pp., mimeo (1973). $8.00.

The above three publications may be purchased as one packet for $16.00.

Also available: a 41-slide show to accompany the SADMESS Final Report, $20.00.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM: Selections from Hearings on the Environmental Education Act of 1970. Edited by Irving Morrissett and Karen B. Wiley. SSEC Publication #140. 228 pp. (1971). Hardbound, $8.95. Paperback, $6.95.

Free Teacher's Guide to accompany this book is enclosed with this group of Profiles or Promise.

All orders must be accompanied by a check, money order, or institutional purchase order.

'FAIR' OPINIONS

Jon: "Dreaming up the idea was the easiest part; after that it was all uphill."

Just about everybody on the staff at one time or another: "Things didn't come off as planned."

Just about everybody on the staff at some other time: "They never do. That's life."

When Alan was asked "What to you was the most unexpected thing that happened this year?", he responded, "The fair actually happened."

Some comments from fair-goers about the least liked and most liked aspects of the fair:

What did you like most about the fair?
"Friendly atmosphere..."
"Viet Nam picture display..."
"Carnival."
"Food house."

What did you like least about the fair?
"The hippie atmosphere..."
"Anti-war display."
"Carnival."
"Having no food around."

You can't please all of the people all of the time.